NEW
NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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No. 476 NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 10, 1906. **Price Five Cents**

DIANA, THE ARCH-DEMON

OR, NICK CARTER'S RUN OF LUCK

By THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"

At the same instant, Nick wheeled Diana around with a sudden jerk and snapped a pair of irons on her wrists, while Ten-Ichi performed the same service for Olivette.

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Diana, the Arch-Demon;

OR,

NICK CARTER'S RUN OF LUCK.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

NICK CARTER'S UNWELCOME CALLER.

Nick Carter's valet, Joseph, opened the door softly and entered the study; then he stood patiently and silently, waiting until his master should raise his eyes from the book he was reading.

"A lady to see you, sir," he said then.

"Well," replied the detective. "Who is she?"

"She bade me say, sir, that she is an old acquaintance."

"I have many such, Joseph."

"I asked her for her name, Mr. Carter, and she replied: 'It is not important. Your master will know me soon enough, when he sees me. Tell him that I am an old acquaintance. That will be sufficient.'"

The detective pondered a moment; then he said:

"Go back to her, Joseph, and say that this is one of the days when I am not receiving people who do not send their names to me." Then he chuckled to himself, and added:

"You may tell her that the twenty-ninth day of February is the only date upon which I make an exception to this rule."

Joseph permitted himself to indulge in a grin.

"That would be nearly four years from now, sir," he ventured.

"Yes; if she cares to wait so long—otherwise she can send up her name."

Joseph vanished; and after a little, he returned.

"Well?" asked the detective.

"She said," replied the valet, "Tell your master that I am Diana Cranston.'"

The detective started and laid aside his book.

"What!" he exclaimed. "Say that again."

"Diana Cranston, sir."

"The devil!"

"Far from it, sir, I should say. Indeed, she is very beautiful."

"Oh, I know that well enough. Diana Cranston, eh?

Now how in the world does it happen that she is here, I wonder."

"I have no idea, sir."

"I am sure that you have not; neither have I, for the matter of that. Where is she, Joseph? In the reception-room or in the parlor?"

"In the parlor, sir. The reception-room is at present somewhat torn up, awaiting the new furniture."

"To be sure."

"Shall I tell her that you will not see her, sir?"

"No. Hand me that green book, marked 'Cases,' from the desk yonder. That is it. Thank you, Joseph."

The detective received the book and began turning over the pages near the front of it; but after a moment, he gave it back into the hands of the valet, and said:

"Return this one where you found it, and open the bottom drawer on the right. Give me the red book that you will find there. So. That is it."

Again he received the book and turned over the pages rapidly.

After a little he stopped and raised his eyes to Joseph again.

"Joseph?" he said; but he spoke more as if he was addressing himself than the servant who stood patiently waiting, in front of him.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you remember that case we had—it was brought to me by a man named Fairfield—the case in which some phonograph records played such an important part?"

"Yes, sir. That was the Canadian case, was it not? The case where the young girl was murdered in a house in Canada, on the shore of Lake Simcoe? The one where she told her story into a phonograph before she was killed?" *

"Yes. That is the case. Now, how long ago should you say that happened? Eh?"

"Well, sir, I would only be guessing at it, but I should say that it is rather more than a year since that time."

"You would be correct, Joseph. It is rather more than a year. It is, in fact, almost two years—but it does not seem so long a time, does it?"

"No, sir."

"Joseph, that woman who is waiting for me down-stairs in the parlor, was one of the conspirators in that case."

"Really, sir?"

"Yes. She was not the actual murderer, but she was what the law designates as 'an accessory before and after the fact'."

"I suppose that means that she was really as guilty as the real murderer, doesn't it?"

"That is precisely what it does mean."

"Wasn't she charged with her part of the crime?"

"Yes; and sentenced to ten years at hard labor in prison. It was always my opinion that she was the real demon in the whole affair; that it was she who instigated the crime at the outset, and therefore—if I am correct—she was actually as guilty, or more so, as the man who did the stabbing."

"But, sir, if she was tried and convicted, and sentenced to ten years, how does it happen that she is here, in your house, in less than two years after her conviction?"

"That is a question which I am now endeavoring to answer to my own satisfaction. She cannot have escaped, for Canadian prisons do not give up their prisoners so easily; and then, if she had escaped, this house would be about the last place on earth that she would care to visit."

"It is very bold of her to dare to come here."

"It would seem so."

The detective was meditative for several moments, and then, as if communing with himself, he murmured:

"That was a remarkable case, take it altogether; about the most remarkable of my varied experience. I suppose you remember it quite well, Joseph, but I feel in the mood to recall a part of it at least, before I go down to hear what that young woman has to say to me.

"It was a girl by the name of Natalie Delancy who was murdered. She was the daughter of a very rich and prominent man—Alexander Delancy; and her father had married a widow with three children—two sons and a daughter, who were triplets. They were monstrosities, too; and they were named Rudolph, Maximillian and Olivette.

"Rudolph was a big giant of a fellow, as ugly of visage as he was in temper; a sort of wild beast, built after the pattern of a man. The other two, Max and Olivette, were as alike in looks as two peas—that is as alike as a man and a woman could be."

"And this Diana Cranston," interrupted Joseph, "was she a relative?"

"No; she was the daughter of a former governess of Natalie—the girl who was killed; but she was the brains of the whole outfit, I always thought. She had fixed herself up to look like Natalie and was impersonating her, at the time of the arrest. I wonder what in the big world she can be after, here, at my house?"

"I expect that you will find that out when you go down to see her, sir."

"Joseph, there are times when you rise to heights of intelligence that are appalling."

"Yes, sir."

"And that was one of them. Joseph, if I should direct you to go down-stairs and take that beautiful young woman by the nap of the neck and the sea—No! I couldn't do that; but if I should direct you to throw her out of the house, what would you do?"

*See No. 475 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "The Mystery of an Untold Crime."

"I would do as you directed."

"Really? Well, I won't place you in such an unpleasant situation, although I confess that if it were not for her sex, that is precisely what I would order you to do; but as it is, I suppose I will have to see her."

"I can send her away if you wish it, sir."

"No; I don't think that I do wish it, after all. There may be a reason for this call that I ought to know. At least, I suppose it is my duty to see her. Where is Chick?"

"He went to his room only a few minutes ago, sir."

"Send him to me—and then you may return to the parlor and say to Miss Cranston that Mr. Carter will be down to see her presently."

When the first assistant entered the room, the detective said to him:

"Chick, who do you suppose is down-stairs, waiting to see me?"

"I'm sure that I haven't an idea."

"Diana Cranston."

"Eh? Di-an-a Cran—— Where did she she come from?"

"You can search me!"

"What does she want?"

"Search me again, Chick!"

"I thought she was in——"

"So did I. However, that isn't what I sent for you for."

"Well?"

"Just fix yourself up a little while I am talking with her, and then go outside. When she leaves the house, you take the trail, and don't leave it until you know something about her. Use your own judgment about how long you keep after her, only report to me once in awhile, over the phone, or by note, or somehow."

"Very good."

"It is a cinch that she didn't come here for nothing. Something is buzzing in her bonnet, and I suppose she will tell me what it is before she leaves me; but all the same, I am of the opinion that it will be well to shadow her for a time."

"It is a sure thing that she is up to mischief of some sort."

"That is as certain as that you are a live man."

"Do you suppose that she has escaped from prison?"

"No; if she had done that, she would not come here to me."

"Then what——"

"She has probably been pardoned by somebody who has the power. She is a very beautiful young woman, and she is as smooth as cylinder oil; she can also be as fascinating as an houri. I will make a guess that she has somehow got next to somebody who possesses pardoning power, and—well, she hasn't done a thing to him but get pardoned. That is about the size of it."

"But what brings her here?"

"Chick, instead of asking that question, you would confer a great favor upon your chief, by answering it; and I would like to know the answer before I go down to see her."

"I am afraid that I'll have to give it up."

"Wise young judge! So do I. Well, I will go and find out."

"And I will get into a disguise and step outside."

"Good! Make yourself up in some sort of a rig in which you can scrape acquaintance with her, if you get the opportunity."

"Do you think that that would be a good move to make?"

"I am certain of it."

"Then I will arrange it so that it can be done. Only keep her with you for at least half-an-hour, will you?"

"Yes; I'll do that."

"And I will do the rest."

CHAPTER II.

A MURDERESS MAKES THREATS.

When the detective entered the parlor where the young woman was awaiting him, she rose in her place to receive him; and in spite of himself, he caught his breath when he looked at her.

He remembered that she was beautiful; he recalled how attractive she was, but he had forgotten all of her charms—or else she had grown vastly more seductive in appearance and manner since their last meeting.

Many beautiful women have, at one time and another, come into the life of Nick Carter—and gone out of it again, frequently through a prison door; but he did not recall another who possessed quite the superlative quality of beauty which belonged to Diana Cranston.

She was tall, and lithe, and graceful, and charming, She was queenly—almost imperial—in her manner; and yet there was a seductive charm about her very haughtiness, which was as puzzling as it was fascinating.

Her costume had been selected with exquisite taste; it fitted her like a glove and it was in the very latest style, as well as of expensive material.

Her figure—well, it was matchless; and her face was so beautiful that the mere thought of it beggars description. She had big, round, innocent blue eyes, and they were shaded by long lashes of absolute black, and bordered by brows as straight and black as the lashes. Her forehead was wide and very white, as was her general complexion, save where the pink showed through the delicate skin of her cheeks and chin. Her features were straight and regular, her mouth was a Cupid's bow, save that the lines of it were firm and strong, and full of character and decision; and the head was set firmly and rather defiantly upon her slender neck and perfect shoulders and bust.

Her hair was dark—and there was such a wealth of it—save when the light glinted upon it at just the correct angle; then one could see certain shades which suggested burnished copper.

Then, when she smiled, you saw two rows of perfect teeth—just the edges of them, you know, and at such times her eyes lighted up with startling reality.

"You scarcely expected a call from me, Mr. Carter," she said in a low, strong, steady voice, that was somehow as attractive as her face and manner.

The detective nodded somewhat curtly, and replied:

"No; I must admit that I did not."

"And you are wondering how I got here, I suppose."

"Doubtless you came as others do."

"You thought that I was still in prison, did you not?"

"I must confess that I have not thought about you at all. I know that you ought to be in prison—or at the end of a hangman's rope."

"That is an exceedingly unkind and ungenerous thing for you to say, Mr. Carter."

"It is nevertheless quite sincere."

"And now you are wondering why I have come here; no?"

"I am waiting—with what patience I can—to find out."

"Possibly I had no definite purpose at all, in coming."

"I hardly think that there was ever a moment in your life when you had not a definite purpose in view."

"Really, I might accept that as quite a compliment."

"You may receive it in any way that suits you best."

"Has it occurred to you that perhaps I might have escaped from prison?"

"No; for in that case, you would not present yourself here."

"Quite true. I did not escape."

Nick made no reply to this remark. He remained standing where he had stopped in the middle of the floor; and if the woman thought that she was to draw a question from him, she was greatly mistaken.

His expression evinced no curiosity whatever concerning the woman; and he saw that his manner had somewhat deepened the pink coloring of her cheeks.

"I was pardoned," she said presently.

Again the detective remained silent.

"You do not ask if Rudolph, and Max, and Olivette were pardoned at the same time," she ventured, at last.

"I do not care—so long as they keep away from me," he replied.

"And yet I might relate some interesting news to you, concerning them—if you cared to hear it," she said.

"I am afraid that it would not interest me."

"Rudolph has gone mad. He has been transferred to a madhouse—a prison for insane criminals."

"And so, he escapes the death penalty, I suppose."

"Exactly. Quite clever of him, was it not?"

Nick shrugged his shoulders.

"And Max is dead," she added. "He managed to hang himself in his cell."

"And so saved the authorities the trouble."

"Yes; considerate of him, wasn't it?"

"Quite."

"Olivette is still in prison. She would have been very much in my way, had she been set at liberty with me."

"No doubt."

"It was the home secretary who stood for me; but I don't suppose you are interested in the details."

"Not in the least."

"Do you realize, Nick Carter, that I have spent almost two years in prison? In a living hell? In a place so loathsome to every sense of refinement that I possess, that with every moment that passed while I was there, the hate that I felt in my heart toward the man who had sent me there, grew and grew and grew, until it became the passion of my life?"

Her entire demeanor had changed now.

The blue eyes no longer suggested the presence of an angel; they glittered like steel points with the sun shining on them. The Cupid's bow mouth had lost its flexibility, and had settled into a straight line, so that the lips looked thin and drawn, and they were no longer a brilliant red, but rather of a pale pink—not pretty now, at all. And yet it was a handsome face, even in its utter fierceness.

The detective shrugged his shoulders without vouchsafing a reply.

"Do you realize it?" she asked again.

"I had not thought about it at all," he replied, this time.

"It is the truth."

"One of the rare occasions when truth appeals to you?"

"Oh, you cannot offend me, Nick Carter."

"Nor affront you, I should imagine; but you could scarcely assert that you are above either. Rather, you are——"

"Beneath them; eh?"

"It is the thought I had in mind."

"Do you wonder why I am here?"

"I have abandoned the idea of finding out."

"I have come to tell you how I hate you. I have come to tell you that I am free. I have come to assure you that being free—having been pardoned—I can still remember those many months in prison; that I will never forget them; that I will always remember that you were the direct cause of my suffering, and that some day you will be made to pay the principal and interest of the debt you owe me."

"Do I understand that you are threatening me?" asked the detective calmly.

It was her turn to shrug her shoulders; and she laughed, lightly, melodiously.

"Why, yes, I suppose so," she replied.

"Was that your reason for coming here?"

"It was part of it; but there was another."

"Yes?"

"I have told you that Rudolph has been transferred to an asylum for the criminal insane. You understood that, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"He played the part so well that he had no difficulty at all in convincing the doctors that he was mad."

"I have no doubt of it."

"And it was all only a part of a plan to escape entirely."

"That is quite supposable also."

"To-night he will be at liberty."

"So soon?"

"Did you ever read Mrs. Shelley's book that is called 'Frankenstein,' Mr. Carter?"

"I have read it—yes."

"Rudolph is to be my Frankenstein."

"Indeed."

"The fact does not seem to interest you."

"Nothing that concerns you could have any interest for me—unless you again transgress the law."

"And then——"

"In such a case I only hope that you will do so in this country, where your wiles and your fascinations will not accomplish a second pardon for you."

"You would hunt me down in that case, I suppose."

"I should endeavor, to the best of my ability, to place you where you belong. I have always believed that it was you who plotted the murder of Natalie Delancy; I have always believed that you were really more guilty of that murder than Max was—and it was Max who committed the actual crime."

She laughed again, lightly.

"I haven't the slightest objection to admitting that you are right," she said.

"Have you anything more to say to me?" asked the detective.

"No."

"And you came here merely to boast?"

"No; I came to see you face to face. I came to assure myself that you lived here in this house. I came in order to see the inside of it. I came to gloat over what is to come."

"Well, if you have seen and gloated all you care to, I would be glad if you would take yourself out of my presence."

"Really? You are so lacking in manners."

"You know," he added meditatively, and as if he had not heard her last remark, "since you are a woman, it would rather disgust me to be forced to apply physical force to you, and so to throw you out."

"I cannot imagine your doing such a thing."

"But, on the other hand, I might call my servant to do it for me."

"Yes. You might do that. Why don't you?"

The detective stepped backward a pace and touched an electric button.

"Joseph," he said, when the valet appeared, "does your watch agree with mine?"

"I will see, sir. It is now thirteen and a half minutes past eight o'clock."

"That is quite correct. Now, observe."

"Yes, sir."

"At seventeen and a half minutes past eight o'clock—which will be just four minutes—if this woman is still here, you will throw her out, something after the manner I suggested to you when she was announced. You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

The detective swung around on his heel and abruptly left the room; and he did it so suddenly that he was gone and the door had closed behind him, before Diana Cranston was aware of it.

CHAPTER III.

KNOCKED OUT BY A WOMAN.

Joseph stood calmly before Diana with his watch in his hand and she regarded him through narrowed eyelids; but he did not raise his eyes to hers at all. He only looked at the face of his watch.

After a moment, she spoke to him.

"Would you do the thing your master has commanded of you?" she asked.

He made no reply and he did not raise his eyes.

She stamped her foot on the floor and demanded:

"Did you hear me, sir?"

If his demeanor was any criterion, Joseph did not hear her, for he remained silent and motionless.

"Look at me!" she commanded, stamping her foot again; but she might as well have addressed her remark to the satyr that hung in its gilt frame over the fireplace, for all the impression it made upon Joseph; and Joseph was wise in his generation, for, by refraining from looking into those magic blue eyes of hers, he escaped the likelihood of becoming a victim of their wiles.

"Your master is a boor, a cad, an upstart, Joseph."

Still he did not seem to hear.

"At all events, since he would not wait to hear it, you can tell him this," she continued. "Tell him that sooner or later I will kill him. Tell him that I shall commit at least one more crime while I live, and he shall be its victim. Tell him that there is no depth of suffering that I can devise which I will not study out and bring to his door. Tell him that I will make him sweat blood, and weep tears of blood. Tell him that——"

Joseph's watch closed with a snap and he took a step forward and laid his hand on her arm.

She wrenched herself free and darted to the opposite side of the room, where she stood at bay, with her head raised, with her eyes blazing wrath, erect, watchful, alert and venomous in every point of expression she possessed.

But Joseph did not hesitate.

He pursued her across the room and again he laid a hand upon her arm.

She sought to jerk away from him again, but this time he had secured a firmer hold, and he retained the grip upon her.

But she made another effort, and this time she succeeded; and the instant she was free, she darted toward the door, but paused when half-way to it, and, wheeling in her tracks, pointed a pistol at Joseph's head.

It was done so suddenly and came so unexpectedly, that Joseph halted in his tracks.

But it was only for an instant.

He smiled grimly then, and pushed forward.

"I would not advise you to use that," he said calmly; and smiled at her.

She uttered a low cry of fury at that, and then with sudden vehemence she threw the weapon straight at his head.

She did it so suddenly and the act was so totally unexpected, that Joseph was taken entirely off his guard.

The weapon, true to its aim, hit him squarely upon the forehead, and he fell backward to the floor, stunned and bleeding from a gash over the temple.

But Diana did not wait to witness the effect of her act. She was convinced now that Joseph intended to carry out his instructions to the letter, and that he would indeed, throw her into the street if she attempted to remain longer in the house; and so she turned and passed into the hall, and thence out at the front door, into the street.

It was several moments after she had gone before Joseph stirred again.

But after a time he opened his eyes and looked around him, in a bewildered manner, for a moment, wondering where he was, and what had happened.

He did not attempt to move until he had thought it all out; and gradually it all came back to him, and he turned a little, to see if she was still there.

Being assured that she was not, he rose slowly and painfully to his feet; but even after that, he subsided into a chair for a few moments more, until he had entirely recovered his strength.

Then he crossed the floor to a mirror, and looked at himself in the glass.

It was only a scratch that he had received, after all, but it had bled freely enough, and there was a streak of blood down the side of his face.

But he made no remark; instead, he turned away and went to his own room, where he washed off the evidences of what he had experienced, changed his collar and otherwise made himself presentable; after which he returned to his accustomed place in the lower hall.

It was not long after that when the detective rang for him.

"Did you have to throw her out, after all, Joseph?" asked Nick.

"I started to do so, but—well, she got the best of me."

"Ran out before you could touch her, eh? What is the matter with your head? It is bleeding, or has been."

"It is where she hit me, sir."

"She—hit—you? What did she hit you with? Her fist?"

"She threw a pistol at me."

"You don't say! And knocked you down, I suppose."

"Knocked me out. Here is the pistol, sir. She went away and forgot it. I found it when I recovered."

"Do you mean to say that you were knocked senseless?"

"I was stunned, sir."

"Humph! Now, I wonder what she did, if anything at all, while you were lying there senseless. Why, Joseph, I did not suppose that you would permit a slender woman like that to get the best of you in a mix-up."

"Nor I, sir."

* * * * * * *

It was after midnight when Chick returned to the house, but he found that the detective had not yet retired, so he went at once to the study.

"Sit down, Chick, and light a cigar, if you care for one. Then tell me all about it."

"What time was it when that woman left here?" asked Chick, while he lighted a cigar. "I did not take notice of the time."

"Well," drawled the detective, "it could not have been very long after seventeen and a half minutes past eight. It might possibly have been twenty, seeing that Joseph did not exactly carry out his orders."

Chick's expression of amazement was so genuine, that the detective laughed aloud; and then he explained:

"You see," he said, "I told him to fire her out at seventeen and a half minutes past the hour; but instead of doing that, he permitted her to knock him down with a pistol. But you look as if you had been somewhere since you left the house; eh?"

"I should say I had."

"Tell me about it."

"I don't suppose you knew that I took Ten-Ichi and Patsy out with me, did you?"

"No."

"That was the way in which I got acquainted with her."

"Eh? So you did that, did you?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"You can see how I am rigged out—in my automobile coat and hat, and all the accessories."

"Yes."

"I got out the big machine and let it stand—with the engine running—just around the corner. Then I posted the boys where they could see her the moment she left the house, and they had instructions to follow her until an opportunity was ripe to carry out the remainder of my orders."

"Which were——"

"One of them was to sneak up behind and seize her, and the other was to attempt to rob her—or to appear to do so, which was the same thing."

"Yes."

"And I was to dash up in the auto and leap from it to her assistance, just in time to prevent the ruffians from carrying out their fell purpose, and all that, you know; just as you read about it in Charles Garvice's stories; eh?"

"Precisely."

"Well, it worked to a charm. When she left here, she turned the corner into Madison Avenue. She seemed to be in a hurry, too, for she walked rather fast, which was all the better for my purposes. The boys watched their opportunity until there happened to be nobody near them, and then they made the attack."

"You weren't far away, I suppose."

"Not on your life. I opened up the machine when they made their break, and I came up with them just in time, of course. I shut off the power and leaped from the machine, and you would have laughed if you could have seen how easily I knocked them both out, and how they ran afterward.

"And say, Nick, I think it is a good thing that they did run, or you might have been minus one of your assistants by this time."

"How so?"

"Diana had drawn a wicked-looking little dagger, and was holding it in her hand ready to use when I came upon the scene."

"What of that? She could not have——"

"Wait just a moment. My first words to her were: 'I am glad to have been of some service, madam, but I observe that you were quite prepared to defend yourself;' and she replied:

"'Still, sir, I am very glad that you appeared when you did. It would have been unfortunate, perhaps, if I had killed one of those ruffians.'

"I smiled, and pretended to be facetious.

"'What!' I said. 'With that small weapon?'

"She smiled at me—and, by Joye, Nick, but she is a beautiful woman, and no mistake!—and then she said:

"'A mere scratch from the point of this dagger would be more quickly fatal than the bite of a cobra.'

"B-rrr! I haven't a doubt that she meant what she said, too.

"I asked her to let me see it, and reached out to take it from her, but she withdrew her hand quickly, and then shoved the small weapon into a little velvet case that she carried; and then the whole thing disappeared somewhere, so quickly that I didn't see what she did with it.

"It is not a safe thing for strangers to handle, she said.

"All this time, mind you, we were standing in the middle of the sidewalk, and perceiving that I could not well prolong the conversation, I said to her:

"'Madam, if you will permit me to put you into the tonneau it will give me great pleasure to drive you to your destination.'

"'I would much prefer to ride on the front seat with you,' she replied."

"I suppose you lost no time in helping her into the auto after that," said Nick, smiling.

"Not a bit. We were off in a jiffy, and we turned into Fifth Avenue, going north. It was then when I ventured to ask, 'Where to, madam?'

"'It is early yet, is it not?' she asked, in reply.

"'Yes, quite,' I said; and then she looked at me and smiled again. Gee, Nick, but she's a pretty woman!"

"Sure!"

"'I quite feel the shock of that attack upon me,' she said slowly, and looking into my eyes all the time she was speaking, 'so if you have the time—for I already see that you have the inclination—I would not at all mind taking a short ride with you, through the park, for example.'

"And that is precisely what we did do—we took a drive through the park."

CHAPTER IV.

CHICK IS UP AGAINST IT, TOO.

"You haven't the attitude of a man who thoroughly enjoyed the time thus passed," said the detective, with one of his rare smiles; for, in reality, he could see that Chick had not yet arrived at the important part of his story.

"Oh, I enjoyed the drive well enough—too well, in fact, as the sequel proves. Nick, that young woman is a veritable demon for slickness, and smoothness—and resource."

"She managed to play it on you, did she?"

"She did—and to the queen's taste, too."

"How did she do it?"

"Well, a drive through the park in your big automobile struck me as being just about the right thing, in order to get thoroughly acquainted with Diana, as you had directed me to do."

"Exactly."

"And, besides, it occurred to me that this one ride might very naturally be made to lead to others."

"Of course."

"So I jumped at the suggestion."

"Just as a trout leaps for a fly; no doubt."

"We went through the park and then along upper Seventh Avenue—it is really a beautiful night, you know—then into Lafayette Boulevard, and—well, it was half-past ten when we got back to One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street."

"You must have done considerable talking in that time, Chick."

"Oh, yes; but there was no talk that amounted to anything. You see, I flattered myself that it was only a beginning. I thought that when the ride was over, I would invite her to take another one to-morrow, and so I exerted myself to say those soft nothings which one supposes please most women.

"She took it all right. I don't think that in all the time I spent with her there were half-a-dozen words uttered which would be worth repeating."

"Doubtless there were many which you would not care to repeat at all."

"Possibly. What is one to do when one has a beautiful woman like Diana Cranston for a companion?"

"Get ahead with your story."

"Well, coming back, when we arrived at One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street and Seventh Avenue, she asked me what time it was. I told her, and she said:

"'I have some baggage at the One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street station of the New Haven road. Would you be so good as to take me there while I attend to it?'

"'I will be so good, of course,' I said; 'but can't I attend to it for you?'

"'I'm afraid not. No; I will ask you to sit in the machine and wait for me. I won't be long.'

"'Possibly the baggage-room is closed for the night,' I suggested.

"'Oh, I am sure it is not,' she said, and then I took her to the station.

"Well, she wouldn't hear to my getting out.

"'Just wait right here,' she said. 'I won't be long. What time is it now?'

"I told her, and she responded that she would return in ten minutes—and I sat there like a fool and waited."

"She forgot to return at all, I suppose," laughed Nick.

"Pre—cisely!"

"How long did you wait before you tumbled?"

"Twenty minutes."

"Chick, I didn't think it of you."

"Nor I. But how in blazes was I to suppose that she was onto me?"

"That is beyond me. I wasn't there, you know. You were."

"Well, you can call me what you like, the fact remains that I never tumbled at all."

"And you waited twenty minutes, eh?"

"Yes; ten minutes after she left the automobile, a train rolled in at the station over my head and stopped there. It was bound into the city. She must have taken it."

"Without a doubt; and she timed herself nicely to catch it."

"Sure. I'm on to that now, all right, after the thing is done."

"You gave her up at last, however."

"Sure. All of a sudden it struck me. I jumped out of the machine, and entered the station. I went to the baggage-room. It was closed, of course. I went to the ticket office, and asked if a lady had purchased a ticket there, for the city, by the last train. Now, what reply do you suppose he made to me?"

"I haven't the least idea."

"He smiled—or, rather, he grinned at me so that I felt like punching his head—and he asked me: 'Are you Mr. Chickering Carter?' Now, what could I say to that, Nick?"

"You might have admitted the soft impeachment."

"Well, I did, if anybody should ask you. It did not require a pile-driver to get the idea into my head that I had been folled, just then."

"I suppose not."

"I said yes, and the ticket agent gave me—this."

The assistant extended an envelope toward his chief—an envelope which was plainly addressed to "Mr. Chickering Carter. To be called for."

"'The lady described you to me so perfectly that I had no difficulty in recognizing you at once,'" added the assistant.

Nick read the note aloud. It was:

"'DEAR MR. CHICKERING CARTER: Thank you *so* much for my very pleasant ride—and *so very* much for your delightful company. You have been *exceedingly* kind. I *do* hope that we may meet soon again, and that in the meantime you will try to think pleasantly of me. You will, won't you? I *fear* that you will be angry when you read this. You will think that I ought not to leave you as I am about to do. But you *will* forgive me, *won't* you? Thank you *so* much. I have passed a *delightful* two hours with you, for I do *so* love to ride in an automobile, especially when—shall I say it?—when *you* are the chauffeur. I am not leaving you in this manner because I *want* to do so, but because I think I *ought;* and I *will* promise to see you again, sometime, if you *really* desire it. If you *do*, you may put a personal in the *Herald*, addressed to Diana, and signed with the same name; after that I will find a way to communicate with you.

Yours very sincerely,

"'DIANA CRANSTON.'"

The detective put the letter down on the table, and, leaning back in his chair, he laughed until there were tears in his eyes.

"Chick," he said, "that's a corker! And the underscored words are the best part of it."

"It's a peach," admitted Chick.

"She is rather a wide-awake young woman, lad."

"Huh-huh," growled Chick.

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I'll tell you what I would like to do."

"Well?"

"I would like you to give me a couple of weeks' vacation, right now."

"What for, Chick?"

"I wish to improve that acquaintance."

"With Diana?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Well, say for instance, to get a hold on her. That is reason enough."

"She hasn't committed any crime, Chick—at least, not one that we can hold against her. There is no use in following her around until she does something to make it worth while."

"All the same, if you don't mind, I would like to be free for a couple of weeks."

"There is that national bank case that we have on hand, to attend to."

"Patsy can follow that up as well as I. Let me have the two weeks."

"Tell me first what you propose to do."

"I'm going to improve my acquaintance with Diana Cranston. I'm going to fall in love with her, head over ears. I'm going to make her fall in love with me, too, if she is capable of it. In a word, I am going to be bad for a time, under her leadership. I will even betray you, if necessary—but, by the Lord Harry, I'll get even with that beautiful demon!"

The detective laughed again.

"You will tackle a pretty big proposition," he said.

"I don't care."

"All right. Have your way—but, all the same, I think you are wasting your time."

"I don't."

"Why not?"

"Nick, she isn't here for nothing. She is much too smart for that."

"Admitted."

"Didn't she threaten you while she was here in this house?"

"Oh, yes; but what of that?"

"She is not one to make idle threats."

"I suppose not. I will admit that she is not; but, all the same, until she does something, it doesn't seem to me that it is necessary to waste any time over her."

"She is very beautiful, and very smart, Nick, and I don't in the least mind wasting a little time in her society."

"I think you are half fascinated already, Chick."

"Possibly I am; anyhow, I think she meant it about that personal."

"It does sound that way."

"You will let me have the automobile, won't you?"

"Yes; I shall not need it. But what are you going to do? Aren't you going to remain at home?"

"I don't think so. I don't know yet what I will do; and I won't decide that part of it until I have seen her again."

"While you were talking together, didn't she give you a name, and her address?"

"Oh, yes. She gave me her right name. She made no bones of saying that she was Diana Cranston, and that she had only just arrived in the city from Toronto. She also said that she was staying temporarily at the Holland."

"Well, why didn't you go there and find out if——"

"I did. She *is* there."

"Oh."

"But it is a thousand to one that she will have gone away by morning."

"Then you ought to be there right now, watching for her."

"Not at all. I'm going to take her at her word. I'm going to do the thing exactly as she asked me to do it. She is too smart to be fooled in any way save one that is a very good imitation of the truth. If I should hang around the Holland to-night, she would know it. In all probability she would come right to me and speak to me. We must not forget that she has done nothing against the law, so far, unless it was to hit Joseph over the head with her pistol."

"Bless you, she had a perfect right to do that. She was only defending herself."

"Anyhow, I left my card and a short note at the Holland for her. I suppose she will get it."

"What did you write?"

"These words: 'I have received your note and will reply as you have directed. C. C.'"

"Well, that is all right."

"Then I am to have my vacation?"

"Yes."

"Thank you. That woman means mischief, Nick, and I will be in the forefront of events, to meet her half-way when she gets ready to act."

CHAPTER V.

A REMARKABLE SCENE OF MURDER.

Chick had been gone from home three days, and Nick Carter had not seen him at all in that time.

All that the detective knew about his disappearance was that he had gone and had taken the big Peerless automobile with him, and that, without doubt, the chief

assistant was already at work on his selected campaign against Diana Cranston.

Nick had discovered, on the morning following his conversation with Chick, that the personal in the *Herald* to which the chief assistant had referred, was already in print, and the detective had not a doubt that Chick had gone to the *Herald* office after his call at the Holland, and had inserted the personal at once, being confident that his chief would let him have his way about the vacation he intended to ask for.

But there had been so many things to occupy the attention of the detective, that he had barely given this matter about Diana Cranston a thought, save to smile about it when he remembered how nicely the woman had foiled Chick, after knocking Joseph down on the occasion of her impertinent call at the house of the detective.

And so three days had gone past, and it came to be the morning of the fourth one.

The detective found himself with nothing particular to do.

It was a rare thing for him to have a morning entirely to himself, and after he had breakfasted and smoked his cigar and read the papers, it occurred to him that Harold Fairfield—the man who had been associated with him in the case about the phonograph records—might be interested to know that Diana Cranston had been pardoned, and had appeared on the scene in New York.

It was not yet nine o'clock in the morning when Nick left his house, and started to walk to the Hotel Mammoth, where Fairfield lived, and it was a little before ten when he arrived.

"Has Mr. Fairfield been down yet?" he asked the clerk at the desk.

"No, sir. I have not seen him this morning."

The detective turned away, and strolled toward the elevator.

Half-way there he encountered Ferguson—Fairfield's valet—and he stopped him in the corridor.

"Has Mr. Fairfield risen yet?" he asked of the valet.

"No, sir."

"Isn't he usually up before this time?"

"Yes, sir, but he gave orders last night that he was not to be disturbed this morning. He was out very late, sir. He did not retire until almost three o'clock, and he directed me to let him sleep this morning until he rang for me. I am going directly back to the rooms. Do you wish me to call him?"

"No. Let him sleep another hour."

"Very good, Mr. Carter."

"If he wakens in the meantime, tell him that I have been here and that I will return between half-past ten and eleven."

"Very good, sir."

The detective went into the hotel library, and seated himself there with one of his favorite books, and it was not until ten minutes of eleven that he again approached the elevator and ascended to the top floor, where Fairfield had his rooms.

Ferguson admitted him, and conducted him at once to the library.

It was the same room where the detective had first listened to the phonograph records which had led to the discovery of the murderers of Natalie Delancy. Nick had visited the apartment many times since then, but now the recollection of that time came back to him with unusual emphasis, doubtless because of his recent encounter with Diana Cranston, he told himself.

"Hasn't your master risen yet?" he asked of Ferguson.

"No, sir. I have not heard a word from him."

"Don't you think it is time that you called him?"

"Yes, sir; perhaps. I would not venture to do so unless you direct me to, however, because of his orders before he retired."

"Oh, well, it is high time he was up and doing. Go and waken him, and tell him that I am here; and that I have brought him a bit of news that will make him wide-awake in a second."

"Yes, sir."

"Hello! Who did that?" exclaimed the detective, as the valet was about to leave the room.

"Who did what, sir?" asked Ferguson, stopping on the threshold between the library and the parlor, beyond which was the bedroom occupied by Harold Fairfield.

The detective pointed toward a portrait that hung against the wall over Fairfield's iron safe; it was—or, rather, it had been, for now it was ruined—a crayon reproduction of the face of Diana Cranston, done by Fairfield in person, and from recollection only. Nick had laughed at him for making it, when it was first shown to him, and at the time Fairfield had replied:

"I did not do it because I wanted Diana Cranston's picture, Nick, but because I regard her face as one of the most beautiful that I ever saw. I made the drawing merely to see if I could do it. I shall destroy it some day."

"I would destroy it at once if I were you," the detective had replied. "I regard her as the most conscienceless woman I ever knew."

"Oh, I'll destroy it in time. Just now I like to study it."

That had ended the conversation at the time; but now, as Nick looked at all that remained of the portrait, he recalled every word of it—for now the picture had been destroyed. That is, the glass had been removed from the frame, and the entire head in the picture had been cut out and was now missing; but glass and frame had

been replaced, and the picture had been rehung where it belonged.

"Who did it?" repeated the detective.

"I'm sure I don't know, sir," replied Ferguson. "I had not noticed it until you called my attention to it. In fact, I have not been in this room this morning, save to pass through it. The picture was all right when I last noticed it."

"When was that, Ferguson?"

"Last night, sir, while I sat in here awaiting the return of Mr. Fairfield."

"All right. He told me once that he intended to destroy it. Probably he did it last night—or, rather, this morning—before he went to bed. Go, now, and call him, Ferguson."

"Yes. sir."

The detective stood in front of the mutilated picture while Ferguson passed through the parlor toward the bedroom to carry out his directions; but it was not half-a-minute before he heard the valet utter a cry of terror, and in an instant more he came running back with a white, scared face, sobbing out as he ran, in a terror-stricken voice:

"Come, sir, come, quick! Something awful has happened! Mr. Fairfield is dead—*murdered!*"

In two leaps Nick Carter crossed the parlor and dashed into the bedroom; but he paused abruptly just beyond the threshold, for one glance told him that he was much too late to be of any service.

Harold Fairfield was dead, beyond any question, and he had evidently been dead many hours.

"Wait," he said. "Go back, Ferguson, and wait; and keep silent, if you can."

"Oh, sir, it is awful! Terrible!"

"Yes, Ferguson. It is both awful and terrible; but we are too late to do any good. He is quite dead, and he has been dead many hours."

"Shall I call the police, sir? Or send for a doctor? Isn't there something that I can do for my poor master, sir?"

"Yes, Ferguson, there is a great deal that you can do for him, and the first thing is to seat yourself in that chair over by the window in the parlor, and wait in silence until I speak to you."

"Yes, sir, I will try. I loved him as if he were my own, sir. I have served him since he was a mere lad, and I served his father before him."

"I know, Ferguson; I know. It is a hard blow for you. But the first thing we must think of is, Who did it? Now be quiet while I look about me a bit."

The interior of the bedroom was in utter confusion.

It appeared as if a terrible struggle had taken place there.

The bedclothing had been dragged to the floor and was scattered around promiscuously in every direction.

Upon many of the pieces there were dark stains of blood; blood had even been spattered against the walls of the room in several places; a chair, which ordinarily stood near the headboard of the bed on one side, had been overturned, and was dragged almost to the center of the room, which, by the way, was a large one.

A small table which had stood at the other side of the bed, and which ordinarily supported a drop-light from the electric chandelier, had been overturned and broken; and the lamp that had rested upon it was shattered to fragments.

A couch that had been between the windows was pulled partly toward the center of the floor, as if a person in struggling had seized upon it, and so drawn it away from its place; and there were several well-defined blood-stains upon it, one of them being evidently the imprint of a hand.

There was a picture—a glass-covered engraving—which had been pulled down from the wall, and it had been jerked upon so desperately that the hook by which it had been supported was torn from the molding, and the glass in the frame was broken.

A copy in bronze of the Hermes of Paxiteles had been dashed to the floor from its pedestal, and was broken; the bureau was moved several inches from its place; the plush rug was wrinkled, and one edge of it was turned over; ink was overturned on a small desk in one corner, and had run down over the billiard-cloth covering and dripped upon the rug so that it made a big splash upon it; even the bed had been moved several inches out of place. Taken all together, the room looked as if a cyclone had struck it.

The dead body of Harold Fairfield was stretched crosswise upon the bed so that his head hung over the edge of it, and almost touched the floor.

Both his arms had been thrown over his head, and the right hand touched the rug; the left arm did not reach so far.

Fairfield's head and face were almost unrecognizable from a mass of bruises over both, as if he had been clubbed and clubbed again and again, even after he had ceased to resist.

There were twelve stab wounds in different parts of his body, any one of which would have been fatal; but as if the fiend who had done such awful work were not satisfied with the result of mere death, his cheeks and forehead had been cut and slashed with a knife until they were totally disfigured.

He had been attacked after he had retired, for he wore his pajamas; his clothing was scattered everywhere about the room.

Such was the scene which Nick Carter, standing just inside the door, studied with the exact care of his professional habit, while the valet, Ferguson, retired to the

chair that the detective had indicated to him, and wept silently for his dead master.

But Nick Carter barely moved after the valet left him to seat himself near the window.

He studied—as he always did when such a scene presented itself to view—first, with his eyes alone.

And he did it methodically, beginning at a selected point in the room, and searching every inch of it, walls, and floor, and ceiling, until his gaze should return to the point from which it started.

But search as he might, he could find nothing—at least, not yet—to indicate in any measure of degree who had been there to commit that awful deed.

He saw what has already been described; nothing more.

The confusion; the evidence of a fierce struggle; the broken articles in the room; the general havoc that had been wrought; all that, and nothing more.

"Upon my word," he murmured presently, "in some ways, this is the most remarkable scene of murder that I ever witnessed."

CHAPTER VI.

A STRUGGLE TO FIND A CLUE.

It will not be necessary to describe in detail the hour and a half which the detective spent in the study of that room of death, for during all that time he discovered no single thing which pointed toward the perpetrator of the deed.

Whoever had committed the murder had done it deliberately—so deliberately, in fact, that the very coolness and the studied method with which it had been performed, convinced Nick, at one important point—and it was the only one he gained from his examination. Just what that point was will appear later on.

It happened that this crime was committed when Inspector George McClusky was at the head of the detective bureau at police headquarters, and after Nick had completed his examination, he returned to the library of the apartment, where there was a telephone.

"Is that you, George?" he asked presently.

"Yes. Hello, Nick! I recognized your voice. What's doing?"

"I wish you would come in person to the Hotel Mamas as soon as you can, will you?"

"What's up?"

"My friend, Harold Fairfield, has been murdered in his bed."

"What! You don't say?"

"Yes. I happened to be here when the fact was discovered by his valet, and so far, we two are the only ones who know about it, save the murderer. I wish you would keep up here before I give out the news."

"I'll be there as soon as possible."

"Come straight to the apartment. It is numbered 1492."

"All right. I'll be there inside of thirty minutes."

Nick returned to the door of the bedroom then, and closed it. Then he spoke to Ferguson.

"Come into the library with me," he said; and the valet followed him, again sinking into a chair, and still sobbing in gasps.

"Control yourself, Ferguson," said Nick sharply. "This is a time for action, and tears will do no good. Mr. Fairfield would demand one thing of you and of me, if he could speak to us now."

"What would that be, sir?"

"That we find his murderer."

"Yes, sir. I thought you would say that."

"Now, control yourself, and reply to my questions clearly."

"I will, sir."

"What time did your master return home this morning?"

"It was exactly half-past two o'clock, sir. I know because he looked at his watch when he came in, and mentioned the time."

"How long after that was it when he retired to his room?"

"Within a few minutes, sir."

"Did you leave him at once, or did you attend him to bed?"

"I left him at once, sir. He said: 'Go to bed, Ferguson. You have waited up long enough as it is.' You see, sir, he never wished me to wait up for him when he was late—but I always did so just the same."

"I have no doubt of it. Do you know if he went immediately to bed?"

"I do not, sir."

"Where do you sleep, Ferguson?"

"In a small room that was really intended for a storeroom when the house was built. It is ten feet square, however, and——"

"I don't care about its dimensions. Where is it located?"

"Exactly at the opposite end of the suite from his bedroom, sir."

"Where was Mr. Fairfield when you parted with him to retire?"

"Here, sir, in the library, in that chair where you are seated now."

"What was he doing?"

"Well, sir, if I am not mistaken, he was looking at that picture which has been mutilated. It was because he was looking at it—rather strongly, I thought—that I noticed the picture at the time, and remembered to have noticed it when you asked me about it upon your arrival here this morning."

"So it may be that he was contemplating its destruction at that moment; eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Or the murderer might have done the destroying after the murder was committed."

"I don't see what object a murderer could have had in doing such a thing, sir."

"Possibly not. So, he was seated in this chair, gazing at that picture, when you left him, was he?"

"Yes, sir."

"And did you retire at once?"

"I did."

"Were you soon asleep?"

"Almost at once, sir. I do not remember anything after my head touched the pillow until I awakened this morning."

"Were you not disturbed at all during the night?"

"Not at all."

"Do you remember that you heard any noise—even the slightest—which you did not regard as important at the time?"

"I am sure that I did not hear a sound, sir."

"Now, when you arose this morning, what did you do?"

"The same as I always do, sir. I went through the rooms to set them to rights—to straighten up things, you know, sir."

"Yes; and did you find that everything was in the usual order?"

"Yes, sir. I noticed nothing at all that was out of its position."

"You refer to all the rooms, I suppose."

"To all of them except the bedroom occupied by Mr. Fairfield, of course. I did not go into that room."

"I understand that. But everything else was as usual, was it?"

"Yes, sir; everything."

"Now, tell me everything—every word, mind you—that your master said to you after his arrival home last night."

"I have already told you that, sir. Beyond sending me to bed after telling me that I had waited up long enough, he did not utter another word in my hearing, save to say good night to me."

"How did he appear?"

"Just as usual, sir."

"Was he in good spirits?"

"I think so, sir. If not, I saw no evidence to the contrary."

"Did he seem preoccupied at all?"

"I don't think so. I did not notice—and I think I would have noticed had he been so."

"What time did he go out last evening?"

"He returned before dinner, sir—I think it was about seven o'clock. I am under the impression that he was dining out somewhere, although I do not know for certain. He did not tell me; but I did notice that he dressed with unusual care. I had to change his tie three times before he was pleased with it."

"But you have no idea where he went?"

"No, sir."

"Who has called upon him lately, Ferguson? Any strangers?"

"I do not know of any."

"Do you receive his mail when it is left at the door?"

"Yes, sir."

"Has there been any letter lately that has disturbed him?"

"I do not think so."

"Ferguson, do you recall the features of that picture that is destroyed?"

"Perfectly. I often looked at the face. I thought it very beautiful."

"Do you—or, rather, did you—know who it represented?"

"No, sir; I was never told that."

"But if you should see the original of that picture—the woman herself, in the flesh—you would recognize her, would you not?"

"I think I would; yes, sir."

"Have you ever seen her at all? At any place, or at any time?"

"No, sir, I am sure that I never have."

"Do you know if any woman has called here to see him or to ask for him lately?"

"I know that none has done so."

"And yet you saw him very earnestly regarding that picture, after he came to his rooms last night."

"Yes, sir."

"What was the expression of his face at the time? What impression did you receive regarding it?"

"I should say that it was one of amusement rather than anything else."

"And that is all?"

"Yes, sir."

"There doesn't seem to be anything connected with his conduct to hang a clue upon, does there?"

"No, sir."

"Now, Ferguson, what do you do nights in regard to locking the door which communicates with the corridor of the hotel?"

"Nothing at all, sir; we merely close it when we pass through."

"It is locked only by a latch, then."

"Yes; Mr. Fairfield carried a key in his pocket always, and I have one also. He preferred that way to ringing for me to admit him, although there were times when he forgot his key, and was therefore obliged to ring."

"Wait where you are a moment, Ferguson."

The detective rose and passed into the bedroom

again, and presently he returned, after having removed every article he could find in the pockets of the clothing that Fairfield had worn the preceding evening.

These he laid out upon the library table, and then, one by one, he inventoried each article as follows:

"Three hundred and fifty-five dollars in currency; fifteen dollars in gold; eighty-five cents in silver; a silver penknife; a silver match-safe; a gun metal cigarette-case; an enameled address-book; a diamond stud wrapped in tissue paper; a watch and fob, with seal; a gold lead-pencil; a card-case, and a scrap of paper torn from the *Herald*. There is no key here at all, Ferguson," he said, in conclusion. "Did he ring for you last night?"

"Yes, sir; I remember that he did."

"Did he mention not having his key?"

"No, sir."

"But it is likely that he looked for it and could not find it, before he rang the bell."

"I suppose so, sir."

Nick picked up the scrap of paper that had been torn from the *Herald*, and unfolded it.

Then he started and frowned, for what he saw before him was the personal notice which he knew to have been inserted by Chick, addressed to Diana. It was as follows:

"DIANA: I hope you will keep the promise made to me in your letter. I shall be at Fifth Avenue and Fifty-ninth Street entrance to park every afternoon at four till you appear. CHICK."

The detective read the notice several times over with frowning brows, and then he muttered to himself:

"I wonder why in the name of all that's puzzling, Fairfield carried that personal in his pocket? I wonder? I wonder?"

CHAPTER VII.

THE TALE OF THE BLOOD-STAINED ROOM.

There was a summons at the outer door just at the moment when the detective completed his questioning of the valet, and, upon opening it, he found the inspector there.

Conducting him to the library, where the valet was still seated in the chair where he had replied to the questions, Nick said:

"Ferguson, this is Inspector McClusky, from police headquarters. While he is here with me, and we are making a somewhat more thorough examination of the premises, I wish you to go out, and if possible ascertain for me where it was that Mr. Fairfield passed the evening last night. You can probably find out from some of his friends. Don't you think so?"

"Well, sir, I know most of his friends, and almost all the places where he was likely to go. I will do my best."

"That is right. Don't fail to find out, if it is possible to do so. But before you go I wish to caution you about one thing."

"What is that, sir?"

"You must not breathe a word of what has happened here—to anybody."

"I am afraid, sir, that it will be impossible for me to conceal from his friends that I am in trouble."

"I know; but to explain that, you may let it appear that your master is not at home, and that you are greatly worried about him. Now, go. You had better visit his clubs first—I think there are three where he was in the habit of going considerably."

"Yes, sir."

"And return here as soon as you have discovered what I wish you to."

"I will."

When he had gone, the detective turned to the inspector.

"Well, George," he said, "here is an affair which will puzzle us all to bring home to the murderer."

"Is it involved in so much mystery, then?"

"No; I think that I already know who is the murderer."

"You do? Then what——"

"But there is not a scintilla of evidence to prove it. There is not a clue in sight. In fact, everything that one can see would point to anybody in the world almost *except* the person whom I suspect."

"You are not one who is given to suspecting people, Nick."

"Not at all; but in this case I think I have good reason to do so. But before we discuss the matter at all, I want you to see the body and the condition of the room where the crime was committed."

"I'm ready."

"Come this way, then."

The detective led the way through the parlor, and opened the door into the bedroom, stepping back as he did so in order to allow the inspector to enter ahead of him.

But McClusky did not enter the room at once.

He did precisely as Nick had done when he first discovered the condition of the room.

He came to a halt just inside the threshold and stood there, using his eyes only, and looking with eagle glances around the room, studying everything he saw, and commenting only to himself; and Nick, with an inscrutable smile on his face, stood near, watching him.

"Looks as though there had been about thirty-five men here," said the inspector presently, with a shrug of his shoulders, "and most of them giants; eh?"

"There is that suggestion," replied the detective calmly.

"Almost too much of row, wasn't there, Nick, to happen without waking the people in the next block?"

"That was the manner in which I sized it up, George."

"Little bit too studied, this cyclonic disturbance; eh?"

"Quite so, I think."

The inspector stepped farther into the room, and began a cursory examination of some of the blood-stains. Then he crossed over to the body—Nick had not touched it or moved it—and examined that carefully. After that he touched, tentatively, each object of furniture in the room that had been moved; and then he returned to the doorway beside Nick.

"I'm through—for the present," he said.

"All right; let's return to the library and sit down."

They returned, silently, to the library, which was by far the pleasantest room in the suite; and then, before either of them spoke, Nick pointed toward the mutilated picture on the wall.

"What is it?" asked the inspector.

"It was, last night, the picture of a very beautiful woman," replied Nick.

"Well what about it?"

"It was intact when Fairfield came home, a little before three this morning. One of the last things he did—in fact, the very last thing that he is known to have done—was to sit in this chair where I am, and fix his eyes upon that picture."

"The valet told you that?"

"Yes."

"And the picture had not been injured at that time?"

"No."

"Do you suppose that he destroyed it himself, Nick?"

"I don't know. I had better tell you, George, before we go any farther, that the picture was a likeness which Fairfield had made from memory of the face of Diana Cranston."

"What! Do you mean the woman who was connected with that murder case of yours in Canada? That phonograph case?"

"Yes."

"Well, if he made the picture himself, why should he have destroyed it?"

"I suggested to him once that I wouldn't have it around at all, and he replied at the time, that some day he should destroy it. It is possible that he made up his mind to do so when he came to his rooms this morning—and did it."

"Why, yes, if he thought of doing it at all."

"But there is a coincidence connected with it that is worth some consideration."

"What is it?"

"Diana Cranston appeared in New York four days ago."

"Eh? I thought she was in prison."

"So did I; but the fact is that she boldly came to my office on that day, and announced to me that she had been pardoned through the influence of the home secretary, or some of his friends."

"Pardoned, eh?"

"Yes."

"Why did she go to your house?"

"To let me know that she was at liberty; to tell me that she was pardoned; to make certain that for the time at least she was beyond my reach—and, finally, to threaten me."

"Threaten you?"

"Yes."

"What has become of her since that time?"

"I don't know—but Chick does."

"Ah! You have set him on her track?"

"No; he put himself on her track."

Then, in as few words as possible, Nick related to the inspector all that had happened at his house, and afterward in connection with Diana Cranston; and at the conclusion, McClusky said:

"When I came into the rooms you said that you thought you already knew who had committed the murder."

"Yes."

"It is not difficult to name the person whom you suspect."

"No."

"Diana Cranston."

"Yes."

"Do you suppose that she would have mutilated her own picture?"

"If she did so, it is the only clue to her presence here that she left behind her."

"That is true enough."

"And aside from that, if she were the murderer, she has gone to extraordinary efforts to make us believe that there was at least one great big strong man here who did the deed."

"Yes; a woman could hardly have put up such a struggle as appears to have happened in that bedroom."

"I should say not. But the whole thing is too studied."

"Decidedly so."

"And the first wound that Fairfield received killed him instantly. I think he was struck while he was sleeping. I do not believe that he ever knew he was attacked."

"That is my opinion, George. The broken articles in that room have been broken deliberately; the furniture that has been moved out of place has been moved with deliberation. The whole thing strikes me as it would if some gifted person had been setting a stage to produce a desired effect."

"Exactly."

"And it is so with the blood-stains."

"Yes."

"It looks to me as if the murderer, after the deed was done, had deliberately dabbled her—or his—hands in the blood of the victim, and afterward smeared over the articles where we find the stains—and besides there is another proof of that."

"Where?"

"You have not been in the bath-room yet?"

"No."

"Follow me."

The detective led the way into the tiled bath-room, where he pointed first to a tiny spot of blood on the floor near the door. It was not larger than a small pea, but it was unmistakably blood, and it was as fresh as the blood in the bedroom.

"And, now, look here," added the detective.

He drew the inspector to the wash-bowl.

"Bend over," he said, "and cast your eyes close under the rim of the bowl on that side. Do you see anything?"

"Yes."

"A few little red spots, where blood, diluted with water, has been splashed against the side of the bowl, and where it has escaped the attention of the person who did the splashing, when she—or he—was cleaning the bowl of all traces of blood afterward."

"Exactly."

"So, you see the murderer came into the bath-room to wash up after the crime was committed."

"Certainly."

"George, if there had been a struggle in that bedroom that was anywhere near as severe as the murderer would like us to believe, it follows that the murderer could not have wholly escaped, doesn't it?"

"Of course it does."

"And there would have been a whole lot more blood scattered around that room than there is, don't you think so?"

"I quite agree with you."

"Well, now I would like to tell you in consecutive form just exactly what I make out of this whole affair, and I would like you to follow me carefully, so if there is any point wherein you do not agree with me, you will perceive it at once, and tell me about it."

"I will do that, sure."

CHAPTER VIII.

NICK CARTER'S VERSION OF THE CASE.

"I will have to take you back a little way and touch for a moment upon that other case to which we have referred," began the detective.

"You mean the one you refer to as the phonograph-record case?"

"Yes."

"All right."

"Natalie Delancy—the girl who was the victim in that case—was the daughter of Alexander Delancy, who is a very rich man and a very prominent one in Canada. Natalie's mother died in giving her birth, and Natalie was reared mostly by her half-sister and half-brothers, and was always in the care of a governess, who was the mother of Diana Cranston."

"Yes."

"I have always been of the opinion that it was Diana who engineered that murder; who originated that conspiracy, and I believe that she worked upon it, getting ready for it, for a long time—years, in fact—before the consummation of her plans."

"Well?"

"At the time of the arrest—which took place at Delancy Hall, on the southern shore of Lake Simcoe—we gathered in four persons. They were Rudolph, Max, and Olivette La Rue—the half-brothers and half-sister of Natalie—and Diana Cranston. The party which made the arrests consisted of Chief of Police Murray, of Ontario, and there were Ten-Ichi and myself to assist him, and we had with us the man who now lies murdered in this apartment, Harold Fairfield."

"So! He was with you, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Diana tried to kill Murray, and she came rather near to succeeding, too; and when she was prevented from doing so, instead of losing her head and cursing, and all that, she remained as cool and collected as you please.

"I studied the woman with great care all the way on our return to Toronto, and before I parted with Murray, after it was all over, I said to him, in speaking of Diana:

"'Murray, that woman will be dangerous yet. If she ever regains her liberty—and it is a hundred to one that she will find a way to do it—it will be up to the members of this outfit to look out for themselves, for she will kill one or all of us if she ever has an opportunity.'

"'What's the matter, Nick?' he asked me. 'Are you weakening?'

"I laughed at him, of course; and I said:

"'No; I am only suggesting that you take good care that she does not escape.'

"'Never fear that,' he replied; and there the conversation came to an end; but I noticed several times while we were on the way to Toronto after the arrests, that she was glaring at Harold Fairfield in a manner which—if looks could have killed—would have turned him into a corpse then and there; and, therefore, after we had attended to all our business in Toronto, and were on our way home in the train, I said to Fairfield:

"'Harry, if it ever comes to your knowledge in any way that that woman has escaped, or has somehow left prison, I want you to promise me that you will come to me at once and tell me about it.'

"'What woman?' he asked; and I replied that there was only one of the two that he thought about twice.

"Well, that practically ended that conversation. He made the promise.

"You see, George, the point was that while coming down on the train from Baldwin to Toronto, Murray had asked me about the phonograph-record part of the case, and I had explained it all to him. I told him how Fairfield had purchased the express-box at an auction sale, how in that way he had discovered the records, and I described to him how they were found to contain the story told to them by Natalie Delancy while she was calmly waiting to be murdered.

"Well, there you are.

"Diana heard all that. She understood at once that the one man who was really responsible for her undoing was Fairfield. If he had not discovered the records, she and her associates would never have been suspected of their crime, probably, and she—Diana—would have posed as Natalie, and have become possessed of all her fortune.

"Now, George, all that is the mere preamble to what I have to say."

"I understand."

"Four days ago, in the evening, Diana Cranston called at my house."

"Yes."

"I have told you already about that call; how I received her; what was said; of her distinct threats to kill me if she had a chance, and——"

"Did she threaten Fairfield at that time?"

"No; his name was not mentioned. I have told you also, haven't I, about the manner in which she escaped Chick that night, and how he felt about it?"

"Yes."

"She told him in the letter she left for him at the One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street station to put a personal in the *Herald* if he cared to see her again; and now I wish to tell you that among the articles I found in Fairfield's pockets when I searched them just a little before you came here was a torn bit of the *Herald*, upon which was printed the personal that Chick inserted."

"That is rather odd, isn't it?"

"Yes; I think it is."

"Do you suppose that Fairfield saw the personal and recognized it? Would that account for his having it in his possession?"

"No; I don't think that at all."

"What is your idea about it?"

"I think that when Fairfield came home between two and three o'clock this morning and seated himself in this chair to gaze at the picture of Diana, he had just left her actual presence."

"Eh?"

"I think he had seen her, and had had an interview with her."

"By Jove, Nick, that isn't at all unlikely."

"I think that during that interview, she either picked his pocket of his latch-key, or in removing something from his pocket, he dropped it and she picked it up."

"Go on, Nick. You are opening up an entire new field of thought."

"If the latter was the case—if he dropped the key and she picked it up—it suggested to her at once the practicability of her entering his apartment after he had retired. You know there would be no difficulty at all in her entering this great hotel, and asking her way to the corridors of this floor at any time of the day or night without being questioned, don't you?"

"Certainly."

"You have never seen Diana, have you?"

"No."

"George, I think that she is the most startlingly beautiful woman that ever lived."

"Bar none, eh?"

"I never saw her equal."

"Well, what of it?"

"Fairfield was not the man—if such a woman chose to exert her fascinations upon him—to withstand them."

"You mean that he would fall an easy victim to her?"

"To her beauty. I mean that if he *did* meet her somewhere last night, that she twisted him around her fingers like a string, and worked him to her will like soft putty."

"What of all that, Nick?"

"Nothing, only it explains why he sat down in this chair with his face toward her picture, and stared at it for a long time before he retired. He was thinking at that time about me."

"About *you?*"

"Yes. It is my opinion that he remembered just then two promises that he had made to me."

"What were they?"

"He had promised me that if ever he heard or knew that Diana had left prison, he would inform me at once; and he had partly promised me that some day he would destroy that picture. Now, when he sat down in front of the picture, and fixed his eyes upon it, he was deciding in his own mind that he would break both of those promises."

"I see what you are at. Go on."

"It all makes me certain in my own mind that he had seen her; that he had talked with her; that he had passed considerable time in her company, and that he had fallen a victim to her beauty and her wiles. I haven't a doubt that he had boasted to her of his possession of this picture which he had made himself. Perhaps he even asked her to come here sometime to see it. Possibly she led him on step by step—for she is bold enough for any-

thing—until he deliberately offered her the key to his rooms, telling her that she could come here at any time she pleased. We will never know the truth about that surmise now, unless she should choose to reveal it sometime—but such a thing is possible."

"And she—wasn't she rather playing the high and mighty?—would she be willing to appear to place herself in a wrong position with him in order to induce him to do such a thing?"

"My dear fellow, you couldn't place her in a false position if you tried. There is no position that would be false for her. With all her beauty, she is a bad woman—bad through and through, if I am any judge, and I think I am."

"Well?"

"The point is that she somehow managed to possess herself of that key, while she was with Fairfield last night. After that, she kept tabs on him until he came to the hotel. I would think it more than likely that she disguised herself in male attire and followed him here."

"Wouldn't she be apt to be spotted?"

"No. She is tall and well-built. She is good at disguises. It would not be a difficult thing for her to do."

"Go ahead, Nick."

"Can't you see that in all probability they drank wine together before he came home? It would be a simple thing for her to introduce an eighth of a grain of morphine into his wine, and that would make him very sleepy the moment he retired—if he did so not too long after swallowing it."

"Sure."

"After that, she had only Ferguson to deal with; and crafty as she is, she could easily have found out from Fairfield before they parted, that Ferguson sleeps at the opposite end of the apartment, and that an eight-inch gun wouldn't waken him after he is once asleep."

"So you think she followed him here, eh?"

"I am reasonably certain of it. She had the key. She could let herself in quietly and silently. She could sit here in one of these chairs and calmly await the time to act, after she knew that her intended victim was in bed."

"And then she went in there and killed him?"

"Just that. She went into that room—where, by the way, Fairfield always kept a dim light, for he had a nervous dread of being in the dark—she had her dagger in her hand, ready to strike. She selected the spot where she would stab him with great care, so that the first blow would do the work, and so that after it was delivered, she could carry out the remainder of her program at her leisure."

"By thunder, Nick, but it was a cold-blooded thing to do! Eh?"

"Did you examine the wounds carefully? Did you not notice that the first stab was different from all the others?"

"Yes."

"Well, George, I think she struck that first blow and left the weapon in the wound while she got up this little stage-setting for our benefit. While she moved the bureau and the couch out from the wall; while she pulled down the statue and knocked over the table that held the lamp, and attended to all the other small details to make the room appear as if Fairfield made a desperate struggle for his life. And when all that was done—why, then she smeared things with blood, made the extra wounds, mutilated her victim's face, pounded his head, and all that, and then calmly went to the bath-room and washed."

CHAPTER IX.

THE PICTURE OVER THE SAFE.

"You are making her out a regular demon incarnate, Nick," said the inspector, after a short pause.

"That is exactly what she is."

"Well, go ahead with your surmises. I find nothing to object to, so far—always provided that your first suspicions are well taken."

"Remember that I have suggested that she was disguised as a man."

"Yes."

"That would have enabled her to pass into the hotel much more easily."

"Granted."

"Well, after the murder, and after she had arranged the appearance of the bedroom to her satisfaction, after she had mutilated the corpse and smeared the blood from the wounds over everything within reach, and after she had stood off at one side and admired her work, studying it and possibly improving upon it by making little touches here and there—after all that, she went to the bath-room to wash up."

"You said that before."

"I didn't say all of it. We found the few telltale evidences that the murderer had been in there, didn't we?"

"Yes."

"George I have been in that bath-room a great many times, when I have been here with Harold Fairfield—and it has been a habit of mine to call upon him quite frequently during the last two years."

"What of that?"

"Ferguson is a very careful and a very methodical valet."

"Well?"

"I have noticed, every time that I have been in that bath-room, that there were always four folded clean hand towels and two ditto bath towels there, ready for instant

use. There was never any deviation to that rule—until this morning."

"And now?"

"Now, if you will return to that room, you will find that there are only *three* hand towels there, ready for use. The fourth one is missing."

"You mean, I suppose, that that is the one the murderer used, and——"

"And the murderer carried it away after using it. Yes, that is what I mean."

"Well, what has that to do with the general case, eh?"

"My dear fellow, no one but a woman would ever have thought to carry away that towel; a woman would have thought about it, and would have acted on the thought."

"Possibly."

"Again, it all goes to prove that Fairfield must have been dead with sleep by the time he had taken off his clothing—and that carries out my idea that he was given morphine before he came home."

"Where do you deduct that idea?"

"Because, instead of going to the bath-room to wash his own hands before retiring, he tumbled into bed—and doubtless went at once to sleep."

"Oh, I see. Yes, that is likely."

"Well, now we have her—and now we are pretty well satisfied that it was a woman, aren't we?"

"Yes."

"Now we have her after she has washed her hands and has destroyed the outward personal appearance of her connection with the crime. Now, let us follow her."

"Go ahead."

"She folds the towel carefully, and stuffs it into one of the pockets of the coat she is wearing. Then she passes back into the bedroom for a last survey of her work. Satisfied with that, and with the general effect she has produced, she turned off the light entirely——"

"There is a point, Nick. You said a little while ago that Fairfield always kept a light going in his room."

"Yes."

"Was there one there when you found him this morning?"

"No: it had been turned off."

"Hah-huh!"

"So she turns off the light entirely, and goes into the parlor.

"I haven't any doubt that she remembered then the picture he had told her about as having made from memory of her face. It was a very good likeness, too. At all events, she would have a woman's curiosity to see it, particularly as it was done from memory."

"You're right."

"She couldn't find it in the parlor, so she went to the library—the adjoining room."

"This room."

"Yes; and she found it."

"And mutilated it."

"Not at all."

"What then?"

"She merely cut out the face to take away with her. She wanted it."

"What in the world would she want of that?"

"In the first place it was a likeness of herself, and probably she did not like the idea that it should remain here where she had just committed a murder. It was as if she remained here herself almost."

"There is something in that."

"Then, again, it was a beautiful picture. A picture of a very beautiful woman, and it had been done by a man who had admired her enough, under adverse circumstances, to draw her face from memory alone; but the strongest reason of all was that it was the handiwork of the man she had just killed. It was a memento of the occasion, so to speak."

"One doesn't like to suppose that she would carry it away for that reason alone."

"Why not? Women acquire stranger things than that. In the South, when they burn a nigger at the stake, the white women fight over bits of his bones that are left in the embers of the fire. They like to save them. Counterfeiters are invariably caught because their vanity compels them to carry around on their persons specimens of their own handiwork; and so it goes on, all through human nature."

"That is all very true—but we are only guessing about this picture after all."

"Perhaps so; but the fact remains, that if we can find out where Diana Cranston is staying—and Chick should know that much by this time—and if we can search among her effects and discover the face that was cut from that picture, or the towel that she stole from the bath-room, either or both, but preferably the picture, we shall have all the proof that we want, won't we?"

"It would certainly be rather clear circumstantial evidence; but all the same, we are jumping at conclusions. We really haven't a scintilla of evidence that it was Diana Cranston who committed the murder."

"Not yet, we haven't; but we will get it."

"And in the meantime it is up to me to notify the coroner, I suppose. I will use this telephone and ask him to come here quietly; and then I'll call up my office and send word to the captain of this precinct. The hotel management won't thank us for keeping them so long in the dark about it."

"The hotel management would thank us very much if we kept them in the dark about it forever. They don't like to have murders in their rooms; and about this one, I feel very much as they will, about it."

"How do you mean?"

"I would like to keep it quiet for awhile; but I know it isn't to be thought of."

"Hardly."

"Call up your coroner, then, and attend to the other matter about the precinct, and while you are doing that, I will go down and see the manager. I will put it up to him quietly, and we will keep it as still as possible, at least, until the body has been removed from the hotel."

"Where will you have it taken, Nick? He was your friend, and he was rather alone in the world, was he not?"

"I will send it to Merritt's, I think. We can have the funeral from there, too. I will attend to all that."

"Very well, and I will use the telephone."

"If Ferguson should return while I am out, George, I wish you would not let him tell anything until I return. I think it would be better if we heard his story together."

"Yes. All right."

Nick was down-stairs thirty minutes with the manager, during which time he made all necessary arrangements; and when he was returning, he encountered Ferguson in the elevator.

Beyond nodding to each other, no greeting passed between them; but as soon as they were again in the library of the apartment, Nick began his questions.

"Well, Ferguson," he said, "what have you discovered?"

"I have ascertained that Mr. Fairfield passed the entire evening inside this hotel," replied the valet.

"Do you mean that he did not go out at all after he dressed?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then he dined here—in the great dining-hall?"

"Yes, sir, with a lady."

"With a woman?"

The detective and the inspector exchanged glances.

"Did you get a description of the woman, Ferguson?" asked Nick.

"Yes, sir. She was very beautiful, with brown hair that had a touch of red in it; with very beautiful, blue eyes and a sweet voice. She was tall and exquisitely dressed, and she wore wonderful jewels. It was the head waiter who told me all that."

"What more did he say?"

"That is about all, sir. He said that her eyes were the brightest and the quickest that he ever saw; that nothing seemed to escape them, and that she acted all the time as if she was expecting another person to join their party."

"It isn't at all a bad description of Diana Cranston," said Nick. "But, Ferguson, you have something more to tell me that you haven't told yet,"

"Yes, sir. The woman is stopping in this hotel."

"What!"

Both detectives sprang to their feet, and then seated themselves again.

"She is stopping in this hotel—or was, last night," repeated Ferguson.

"Why do you say *was* last night, Ferguson?"

"Because she paid her bill and went away this morning. She went——"

"Stop! Did you learn her name?"

"Certainly, sir. She was registered as Mabel Calloway—Mrs."

"And she left this morning. Where did she go?"

"To the Grand Central Station. That is all that is known."

"Did you find out how long she had been here?"

"Yes, sir; a week."

The detective turned to the inspector.

"Now, what do you think of that?" he asked.

"Why, I think as you do—that your Diana has been staying here at this hotel all the time she has been in town."

"But I happen to know that she has not. She was at the Holland, and under her own name, at that. It may be that we are entirely at sea. It may be that this is another woman entirely, and——"

"No, sir," interrupted Ferguson. "If you will allow me."

"Go ahead."

"The head waiter, sir, came to this room a few days ago, with a message for Mr. Fairfield, he told me. He was sent by this same woman, and he swears that there was a picture of her hanging over the safe, in the library."

CHAPTER X.

A WILD CALL OVER THE TELEPHONE.

"She has been playing double on you, Nick," said the inspector, laughing.

"It would seem so, wouldn't it? Well, at all events, with the evidence of the head waiter, it is pretty well settled that I was correct in my surmise in reference to their being together last night."

It was not long after that when officers from the station-house arrived on the scene, and soon after them, the coroner appeared. Then, after giving what directions he deemed necessary, Nick, accompanied by the inspector, left the hotel.

They parted at the door of the big house, and there the inspector said to the detective:

"Well, Nick, although you are pretty well satisfied in your own mind as to who committed the murder, I don't see that you have a nail to hang your hat on in the way of making an arrest; do you?"

"No."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I am going to do as I always do, George. I'm going to find the criminal. I think I ought to hear something from Chick to-day—it is rather strange that he has kept silent as long as he has—and I hope to get an idea how to proceed from him."

"The papers will be filled with accounts of this affair to-night and to-morrow morning."

"Yes; I know. And it will be another of the unsolved mysteries for awhile—unless I do succeed in getting next to that woman much sooner than I expect to do it; but in the meantime, I wish you would let the police force work in its regular way. In other words, I want you to send your own men out on the case precisely as you would do if I were not here and you had not seen me."

"All right. But you will keep me posted as to what you are doing?"

"Sure."

It will be remembered that it was about eleven o'clock in the morning when the detective first made the discovery that his friend Fairfield had been murdered, and since he had been constantly employed ever since that discovery.

He was quite surprised, therefore, to find when he arrived home that the time was after four o'clock in the afternoon.

He was also surprised to find that Joseph was awaiting him on the steps outside the door and that he was pacing up and down the street as if he had not the patience to wait inside.

"What is the matter, Joseph?" asked the detective, as he ran up the steps.

"Oh, sir, I do not know. Only I am certain that something has happened to Mr. Chickering."

"Eh? What is that? Something happened to Chick? What do you mean?"

Joseph had permitted his master to pass him, and had followed him into the hall; but instead of stopping there, the detective ran up the stairs to his own study, bidding Joseph to follow him at once.

"Now," he said, when they were inside the room and the door was closed, "what is it all about?"

"It came over the telephone, sir."

"What did?"

"The message from Mr. Chickering."

"Well, why don't you tell me what it was about? Out with it."

"The telephone bell rang—very sharply, I thought—and I hurried up the stairs, thinking that it was you who were calling for me. I picked up the receiver and said 'Hello!' and instantly I heard Chick's voice. I can repeat his exact words."

"Do so, and be quick about it."

"He called out, evidently in great haste—and as if he were in pain: 'For God's sake, Nick, come to me. I am at——' The message stopped right there, sir, but in place of the blank which followed what he tried to say I very plainly heard the sound of a blow; and that was followed by the noise made by a body falling to the floor. It was precisely as if somebody had struck Chick with a club at the very instant he was trying to telephone."

"How long ago did that happen, Joseph?"

"Less than half-an-hour, sir."

"Has our telephone rang since that time?"

"No, sir."

The detective turned abruptly to the receiver, and, addressing central, he asked:

"About half-an-hour ago there was a call for this number. If, inside of another half-hour, you can tell me from whence that call came—if you can direct me to the address of the house where the other telephone is located, I will send you a fifty-dollar bill, provided you will give your name and private address with the information. This is Nick Carter in person."

He replaced the receiver, and turned to his valet.

"Where is Ten-Ichi?" he asked.

"Out, sir. I don't know where. He went out soon after you did, this morning, and I have not seen him since."

"And Patsy—where is he?"

"He went out at about the same time, sir."

"And has not returned?"

"No, sir."

The detective paced up and down the floor of his study after that, until at last the telephone bell called him; and, hastening to it, he said: "Well?"

"That call that you asked about, Mr. Carter, came from the exchange board of the Hotel Mammoth."

"What!" exclaimed the detective, surprised in spite of himself. "Are you quite sure about that?"

"Yes, sir; I am positive."

"I don't suppose you can tell whether the call originated in one of the rooms of the hotel, or from one of the many booths there, could you?"

"I know that it did *not* come through one of the public phones."

"Yes? How?"

"Because in that case the operator would have a record of it on the book. There is no such record. I asked."

"Then where did it come from?"

"Either from one of the rooms or apartments in the hotel, or through one of the private phones in the different departments of the house."

"I see. Thank you. You shall get your fifty, just the same; and central."

"Yes."

"Hereafter, whenever this number is called, if you will keep a record of who calls, so that I can always find out by the mere asking, I will place you on my regular paylist for a present, once in the while. Good-by."

He turned away then, and for several moments busied himself with a disguise; but in a quarter of an hour he was ready to leave the house.

"Joseph," he said, then.

"Yes, sir."

"If Ten-Ichi or Patsy should return before I do, I wish you to tell one of both of them that it is my orders that they sit here in this room close to the telephone, until I call, or until I have returned."

He went out then, and hastened directly to the Mammoth, where he had already passed so much of his time that day.

It has been mentioned that he had disguised himself; but the reader must understand that he was still a gentleman in his appearance.

He had merely adopted a somewhat elderly personality. He looked, in short, like a prosperous banker or broker, and would have passed for a man who was approaching sixty years of age.

Entering the hotel he went directly to the desk and asked for the manager—and in a moment more he was shown to the private office.

"Percy," he said, as soon as he entered the small office where the manager had his private desk, "you don't know me in this rig, but I am Nick Carter."

"Yes," replied Mr. Percy, smiling, "I know your voice, Mr. Carter. What can I do for you? Is it about that murder? Terrible thing, eh? I cannot tell you how much obliged to you we feel here, for the delicate manner in which you have handled the case so far. Anything——"

"I wish to know all that you can tell me, and all that you can find out from your staff, concerning a guest who is supposed to have left here this morning. I refer to a Mrs. Mabel Calloway."

The manager touched a bell, but before it was answered, Nick continued:

"And I wish that you would, in the quickest way possible, place before me a complete list of the names of every guest who is at present in the house."

"You mean room guests, of course."

"Certainly."

"For how many days, Mr. Carter?"

"For a week."

The manager looked at his watch. Then he smiled.

"You have come at the very best hour in the week for that," he said. "To-day is the end of our fiscal week in this house. It closes at five o'clock. It is now fifteen minutes past the hour, and the list should have been completed."

"What list?"

"We work here on a different plan from any other hotel in the world. I keep one clerk whose sole duty it is to keep on hand a revised list, alphabetically arranged, of all the guests. That is made up from day to day, and the weekly list is on a separate sheet, and is carried along from day to day, so that at five o'clock of to-day it is complete for the week."

He had given the necessary order while he was talking, and now the list was placed in his hand, while at the same instant one of the clerks who could usually be seen behind the desk made his appearance, and stood silently at one side awaiting orders.

"Mr. Carter," said the manager, "this is our detective behind the desk. It is his duty to be prepared to answer all questions like the one you asked just now about a Mrs. Mabel Calloway. After he has told you what you wish to know, we will look over this list together."

Nick Carter thought that he saw the hotel detective, whose duty was so strange and unheard of, start slightly when the manager mentioned the name of Calloway, but he was not certain.

"Do you know about the guest to whom the manager has referred?" he asked sharply of the man.

"Yes."

"When did she arrive here?"

"One week ago to-day."

"And when did she leave?"

"This morning."

"Where did she go?"

"To Toronto."

"Are you sure?"

"I am only sure that it was reported in the hotel here that Toronto was her destination, and that she had her baggage sent to the Grand Central Station. She also took a carriage for the station. More than that I do not know."

"What suite of rooms did she occupy?"

"1494."

It was the detective's turn to start.

"That is the suite which adjoins the one occupied by Mr. Harold Fairfield, is it not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Has the suite been taken since Mrs. Calloway gave it up this morning?"

"It was engaged ahead for something more than a week, sir. It was engaged when Mrs. Calloway occupied it, and she took it with the understanding that she was to give it up this morning. The present occupants are Mr. Jules Gerome and wife, registered from Paris. They came here two hours after Mrs. Calloway went away."

"Indeed!" said the detective. "Within two hours, eh? Thank you, Mr. Desk Detective, if you will take that chair, I will ask you a few more questions."

CHAPTER XI.

NICK CARTER'S RUN OF LUCK.

The man who was known in the hotel as the desk detective was visibly disturbed when Nick addressed him in that manner, and the detective noticed that he was biting his nether lip as he assumed the chair indicated for him.

For a full minute, Nick Carter studied his face silently and with piercing eyes, and so intent was his regard that the man flushed deeply under it.

After a moment, the detective said slowly and impressively:

"I don't know whether you are aware of the fact or not, but I am Nick Carter. I have a habit of noticing things rather closely, and I have noticed two things about you since you entered this room. I need not mention what they are, and I will not—but I advise you to reply to the questions I shall ask you now, with perfect frankness."

"I don't understand, sir——"

"You will understand—thoroughly—in a moment. Remember what I have said. It will be distinctly for your own good to answer me frankly and truthfully. I am sure that Mr. Percy will understood that if you have stretched your idea of your duties somewhat, for the accommodation of a guest, you have done so for reasons which are not criminal, at least. Don't interrupt me, please. You will understand from the drift of my questions what I mean now."

"Very well, sir."

"You look and speak like a Canadian; are you one?"

"Yes, I am."

"And did you, by any chance, hail from Toronto—or near there?"

"I call Toronto my home, although really I came from Jackson's Point, on Lake Simcoe."

"Precisely. And you once had an acquaintance in that neighborhood, named Diana Cranston, did you not?"

"Why—yes, sir. Yes—sir."

"I thought so. And when Mrs. Mabel Calloway came to this hotel and engaged suite 1494, you recognized her instantly as Diana Cranston, did you not?"

"I must admit that I did, sir."

"Precisely."

"Though how you could have known that, I——"

"I saw by the start you gave when the name of Mrs.

Calloway was mentioned, that you knew more about her than appeared on the surface. I already was aware that she was really Diana Cranston, and I guessed that you knew that, too. Your talk and your manner told me that you are a Canadian, and so I put two and two together for the rest of it. Now do you understand why it is best to reply to me frankly?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have known Diana Cranston quite well in the past, have you not?"

"Yes, sir, when we were boy and girl. She boarded with my aunt while her mother was acting as governess over at the big house that we call——"

"Delancy Hall, eh?"

"Yes."

"Do you know that she has lately been in prison?"

"Yes."

"For murder?"

"Yes; but she told me that she had been pardoned—because it was discovered that she was entirely innocent of all connection with the crime."

"Exactly. And you believed her, did you not?"

"Certainly."

"You have been—and probably are now—more than half in love with her?"

"Long ago—yes, sir."

"Did she explain to you why she was here under an assumed name?"

"She said it was because she did not wish people to connect her with the Diana Cranston of the murder case."

"That was, and is, plausible enough. Did she tell you that even while she had her rooms at this hotel, she had others, under her own name, at the Holland?"

"No, sir."

"Well, it is true that she did, athough she gave them up after a day or two. Now tell me; do you know that she *did* go to Toronto, after she left here this morning?"

"I know that she did not go there. I know——"

"You know, in fact, that she did not leave the city at all, don't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know where she did go?"

"No."

"We will drop her for a moment. What do you know about this Mr. and Mrs. Jules Gerome, who have taken the suite that she occupied, and who had it engaged even before she took it at all?"

"What do I know about them?"

"That is what I asked you—yes."

"Nothing at all, sir."

"What! Nothing at all? Is that what you are employed here for?"

"I know that they arrived this morning. I know that the husband is a hopeless invalid, and that he was carried to his rooms in an invalid's chair; but we were assured that it was merely a sort of paralysis of the lower limbs, and that otherwise the man was quite well, when he was not under the influence of opiates. Otherwise we would not have taken them in."

"Are you quite sure that they did not take *you* in?"

"I don't know what you mean by that insinuation."

"Don't you? I am afraid that you are not frank with me, sir."

"I——"

Nick turned to the manager, who had been listening to this conversation in open-eyed astonishment.

"Percy," he said, "I am quite sure that I will not have any use for that list you were so kind as to provide for my inspection. I have found out what I wanted to know in a much more direct and in an easier manner."

"What is it, Mr. Carter? You mystify me greatly."

"This man here knows the whole story. What is your name?" he added, addressing the clerk again.

"James Green."

"Have you seen this Mrs. Gerome since her arrival here this morning?"

"Yes."

"Talked with her?"

"Yes."

"Recognized her? Eh?"

"I don't know——"

"Yes, you do know, too. She is Diana Cranston, isn't she?"

"Great Heaven, sir, are you a wizard?"

"Sometimes. Now confess the truth, or you will find yourself behind the bars charged with being an accessory to a murder, no matter how innocent you may be of intent to commit a crime or to condone one."

"My God, sir, is it true?"

"You will find that it is only too true."

"Yes, sir, she *is* Diana Cranston."

"I thought so. I made a good guess; and it was all

because of that start you gave when you heard the manager use the name of Mrs. Calloway. Now, who is the man who passes as her husband, and who is supposed to be an invalid?"

"I know absolutely nothing about him, sir."

"Is that true?"

"Absolutely true, sir."

"Did you know the La Rues, who were convicted of the murder at the same time that Diana was sent to prison?"

"A little."

"Is this 'Mr. Gerome' either one of those brothers—Rudolph, or Max?"

"No, sir. I know he is not."

"Is he an invalid?"

"I don't know, but I think he is."

"Is he really Diana's husband?"

"No."

"You have seen him?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"An hour ago."

"In their rooms?"

"Yes."

"Was he conscious at that time?"

"I was told that he was dopy from morphine. He especially liked it. He has the back room of the suite, with a man to wait upon him. Diana has the front room of the suite with her maid."

"Ah! So there are four in the party, eh?"

"Yes."

"Can you describe the appearance of this 'Mr. Gerome'?"

"I—I—am not good at that sort of thing."

With two or three quick motions, Nick Carter divested himself of his disguise, for he saw now that he would have an occasion to make use of it—that whatever he had to do while he remained in that hotel could just as well be done in his own proper name. And he remembered that it had often been said that there was considerable facial resemblance between him and Chick, although there was actually no blood relation.

"Look at me now," he commanded of Green. "Does the man in suite 1404, who is supposed to be an invalid, at all resemble me?"

"I think, sir, that he does," admitted Green, at once.

"Now tell me of his condition."

"I have told you all that I can about that, sir."

"When you saw him, he appeared to be in a stupor, you say?"

"Something approaching that, sir."

"It was about an hour ago?"

"Yes."

"Was there a bandage on his head? Did he look as if—— I see that I need not ask. There was evidence that you could see, that he had bruised himself, or that somebody had done it for him, eh?"

"Yes; there was. But I don't see——"

"You don't have to see." The detective turned to the manager, and added:

"The man who is supposed to be the invalid, Mr. Gerome, is no other than my chief assistant, Chick. About an hour and a half ago he tried to telephone to me from that room. He was detected in the act, and somebody knocked him down before he could complete what he was saying. Now——"

The detective paused abruptly, for Green had started to his feet with staring eyes, and exclaimed:

"My God, sir, are you a devil?"

"No; but I am Nick Carter. Now, Green, out with it! Quick! Tell the truth! Who is the woman who is acting as maid for Diana Cranston?"

"She is Olivette La Rue."

"Good! I thought so. And who is the man who is taking care of 'Mr. Gerome'?"

"He, sir? The man who——"

"Who is he? You know! Tell me! Tell me at once!"

"He is Rudolph," came the gasping reply.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WOMAN TERRIBLE.

We must now, for a moment, transfer our attention from Nick Carter to Chick.

We must go back over those four days of his absence from Nick Carter's home, and glance over the events that occurred during that time, just enough to post ourselves about what happened to Chick after he put the personal in the *Herald* and Diana replied to it.

The personal, if you will remember, told her that he would be at the Fifth Avenue and Fifty-ninth Street entrance to Central Park every afternoon at four o'clock, until she appeared.

He was obliged to go there only once, however, for

she came to meet him the very first day, and was punctual almost to the minute.

Chick had the big Peerless car with him, and as if she had foreseen that, she came on foot, so with nothing more than a mere greeting between them, Chick helped her into the seat beside his own, and started the machine northward through the park.

"It was good of you to come at once," he said to her; and she smiled up at him with one of her bewitching smiles, and replied:

"I think it was extremely good of you to make it possible, after the manner in which I treated you when I left you without a word of explanation."

"Where shall we go now?" asked Chick presently.

"Just for a ride. I want to ask you a few questions before we decide upon a destination."

"Well," he said, "what are they?"

"You are Nick Carter's chief assistant, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"And he has told you that I called upon him and threatened him?"

"Yes."

"He sent you out to shadow me, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"For what purpose?"

"Merely to know where you went and what you did. That is all."

"And you took the job willingly, didn't you?"

"I took it gladly—yes. I wanted to know you."

"I suppose you arranged that little scene where the two men attacked me, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"It was quite well done—only I understood it at once."

"I see that you did."

"Well, what I want to know is what do you intend to do now?"

"Just what I am doing."

"What is that?"

"Spend as much time as is possible in your society."

"Because you have been ordered to do so?"

"Yes; but more because I wish to do so."

"How am I to understand that remark?"

"If I had known you longer—or if I dared—I might be able to explain myself better."

"Nonsense! You mean that you are attracted by my beauty. You mean that you are inclined to fall in love with me. You mean that—I wonder if you do, really?—that you are almost ready to betray your master for me? Eh?"

"I mean something very nearly approaching that."

"I will believe you—when you have convinced me of it."

"Then you will afford me the opportunity to convince you?"

"Certainly. I like you, also. You attract me. That is a good deal for a woman to admit, is it not?"

"Yes; and it makes me very happy."

She laughed under her breath, as if she enjoyed it, and Chick was not sure that she was not playing with him. However, he was determined to play his part to the end, and to let matters take their own course as they would.

At One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street and Seventh Avenue, she directed him to turn back again and to go over to St. Nicholas Avenue, after a little, which he did, and presently she directed that they stop in front of a large apartment-house, where she said:

"I am going to leave you here for a few minutes."

"And desert me again?" he asked.

"No. Wait. I really won't be long."

And she was not.

Within ten minutes she was back again.

"I want you to come into the house with me for a little while," she said. "I have some friends who have an apartment here. I wish you to meet them."

Chick's hesitation was so short that she did not perceive it; or, at least, she did not appear to do so; and, besides, she had spoken with perfect frankness, as if it made little difference to her whether he did as she asked or not.

He got down from the machine, removed the spark-plug, and followed her into the house.

They ascended by the elevator to the top floor, where they found the door of an apartment standing open to receive them, and he entered after her. It was yet daylight, remember—not quite five o'clock in the afternoon, in fact.

There was a private hall in the apartment, and Diana led the way along this to a room, or parlor, at the end of it.

She passed inside, and turned and faced Chick as he entered; but he had barely passed the door into the room, when somebody—a big, powerful man—leaped

from behind it, and, seizing him by the arms, pinioned them behind him.

Diana laughed aloud, and when Chick would have struggled, she put out one hand and rested it on his shoulder.

"Silly boy," she said, still laughing. "We are not going to harm you. This is one of my tests for you. Put out your hands, for you must be my prisoner for awhile."

Chick obeyed. He thought it was best to take her at her word, and to appear to fall in with what she evidently intended to appear as one of her jokes; and a moment later he was securely handcuffed, after which another and a larger pair were placed on his ankles, so that he was utterly helpless.

Then, and not till then, the man who had seized him from behind stepped into view, and the assistant at once recognized that the man was Rudolph; and while the giant stood scowling upon him, another door opened, and Olivette appeared on the scene.

Chick understand then, only too well, that he was in for it, to use a common expression.

He knew that this was to be no child's play, and that he had deliberately walked into a trap.

But he was given very little time for reflection, for Olivette held a cloth in her hand as she came toward him, and he scented the odor of chloroform; and the next instant it was clapped over his face, and he lost consciousness almost at once.

What happened after that he did not know.

When he did open his eyes again, he felt dazed and ill, and he knew that in addition to the chloroform, he had been dosed, hypodermically with morphine—and he believed that many hours—perhaps days—had passed since he was made a prisoner.

He had been moved in the meantime, too.

He was no longer in the room where he had been made a prisoner, but in a large and elegantly furnished apartment—and he thought he recognized the furnishings as belonging to the outfit of the Hotel Mammoth.

There were no longer shackles on his ankles or handcuffs on his wrists, and with great difficulty—for he was exceedingly weak and enervated—he dragged himself from the bed, and across the floor to the window.

There he managed to pull himself up until he could look out; and he discovered at once that he had been correct in his surmise, and that he was indeed in a room in the Mammoth.

At the opposite side of the room, he discovered a telephone, and his next act was to drag himself to that, where he managed to get the receiver in his hand, and to call for Nick's number.

It was awfully long in coming, but at last he got the connection. He thought, in his weakened state, that he recognized Nick's voice, whereas it was Joseph who replied to him, as we know; and then he made the frantic call which Joseph repeated to Nick.

But he was interrupted before he could tell where he was. A stunning blow fell upon his head, and he was dragged backward, still conscious, and thrown bodily upon the bed, while Rudolph and Diana stood over him.

"Better let me kill him at once, and have done with it," growled Rudolph. "That will make two, and we will be getting on."

Diana laughed.

"No," she said. "Two murders within twenty-four hours in the Hotel Mammoth would be almost too much of a good thing. Besides, I shall not kill this man, if he is sensible enough to come over to our side. I like him."

Rudolph swore a great oath.

"It won't be well for you if you take a notion to like him too well," he growled. "I will fill him with more wounds than you put into the carcass of Harold Fairfield, if you do—and your own body as well."

"Tut-tut, Rudolph. You are silly. Don't threaten me, or I may take a notion to serve you as I served Fairfield." Then she leaned over Chick, and added: "Did you know that I had murdered Harold Fairfield? And that to-night, or to-morrow, or sometime, I shall kill Nick Carter—and Ten-Ichi? And all who had a hand in my undoing? No? Never mind. You may possibly save your own life—if you are not a fool."

After that they gave him another injection of morphine, and left him.

Later, he was conscious that a stranger looked down upon him for a moment; but he only saw him dimly. We know that it was James Green, but Chick was not sufficiently conscious to know more than that it was a stranger; and after that they administered more morphine, and he lapsed into unconsciousness.

* * * * * * *

It was a little past six o'clock in the evening when Diana Cranston, Olivette, and Rudolph, being seated together in the parlor of their suite, heard a gentle tap

against the door. Rudolph instantly glided away toward the room where Chick was kept, and Olivette opened the door, discovering—as Diana supposed—James Green standing upon the threshold.

He stepped inside at once, and partly closing the door, said in a low tone:

"Diana, we are making the weekly inspection of the hotel. It is a form that has to be gone through with. I have two men outside with me, but they are stupids. I will let them in, and you must conduct us through the suite. It won't take five minutes, and you need not say a word. Just walk ahead of us."

He did not wait for her to reply, but turned and opened the door again, and admitted two men, who gazed around the room, crossed it, and looked out at the windows, and then faced the supposed Green again.

"Now, Madam Gerome," he said, "if you will take us through the apartment——"

She signed to them to follow, and led the way through, so that after a moment they came to the room where Chick was stretched upon the bed, unconscious, with Rudolph seated beside him.

Diana and Olivette were in advance of the three men, and they all paused beside the bed; and then a transformation occurred.

With a quick motion, the supposed Green threw aside wig and beard, and stood revealed as Nick Carter, while Ten-Ichi and Patsy threw off their disguises and appeared in their proper persons.

At the same instant, Nick wheeled Diana around with a sudden jerk and snapped a pair of irons on her wrists while Ten-Ichi performed the same service for Olivette.

Rudolph wheeled in his tracks when he heard the commotion; and then, perceiving instantly what it meant, he whipped a long knife from some place of concealment, and leaped toward the bed.

It was only too plain what he meant to do.

He intended to kill somebody at least, and Chick, unconscious and helpless, seemed to offer the easiest mark.

The knife was descending. It had almost reached Chick, when Nick's revolver spoke, and a bullet from it crashed its way through the brute's wrist; and at the same instant, Nick leaped forward and felled him to the floor with a terrific blow on the jaw.

* * * * * * *

The automobile was found at an up-town garage, where Rudolph had left it, and was easily reclaimed; and as for the murder of Harold Fairfield, Diana confessed it derisively, and with laughter.

She had encountered Fairfield in the corridor of the hotel; she had dined with him that night; he had told her about the portrait made from memory of her face; he had offered to show it to her; she had asked for the key to his rooms, and said that she would go there alone the following day, when he and Ferguson should be out, and see it; and she had gone there that night, and committed the murder, exactly as Nick Carter had read the facts from his study of the situation.

THE END.

The next issue, No. 477, will contain "Captain Satan; or, Nick Carter's Great Mistake."

About the Early Numbers of

Tip Top Weekly

We receive hundreds of letters every week from readers asking if we can supply the early numbers of Tip Top containing Frank's adventures. In every case we are obliged to reply that numbers 1 to 250 are entirely out of print.

We would like to call the attention of our readers to the fact that the Frank Merriwell Stories now being published in book form in the Medal Library are inclusive of these early numbers. The first book to appear was No. 150 entitled "Frank Merriwell's Schooldays."

We give herewith a complete list of all the stories that have been published in book form up to the time of writing. We will be glad to send a five colored cover catalogue of the Medal Library which is just filled with good things for boys, upon receipt of a one-cent stamp to cover postage.

The Price of The Merriwell Books is Ten Cents per Copy. At all Newsdealers

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54—The Young Rough Rider's Still-Hunt; or, The Mystery of Dead Man's Pass.

55—The Young Rough Rider's Close Call; or, The Girl From Denver.

56—The Young Rough Rider's Long Ride; or, Life Against Life.

57—The Young Rough Rider's Silent Foe; or, The Hermit of Satan's Gulch.

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